

REPORT TO CONGRESS

Health-Related Research and Development Activities at USAID

An Update on the Five-Year Strategy, 2006–2010

**HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING –
PHARMACEUTICAL MANAGEMENT**

Health Systems Strengthening

Issues and Rationale

Health systems strengthening research supports the development of effective, efficient, and equitable health systems through initiatives and strategies that lead to health improvement in the areas of access, coverage, quality, and efficiency. Consistent with the WHO, USAID views a health system as consisting of all organizations, people, and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore, or maintain health. USAID advances research in the six core functions, or building blocks, of a working health system: service delivery; human resources; information; medical supplies, vaccines, and technology; health financing; and governance and leadership. In identifying the need for health systems improvements, USAID's approach is to look for constraints in quality, accessibility, or affordability and develop interventions within the framework of the six building blocks to address key gaps and bottlenecks. The challenges to high-quality, accessible, and affordable health services – and USAID's response through research – are summarized below.

- In developing country service delivery models, critical functions of the health system often are challenged by inefficient standards and lack of evidence-based practices. Quality-improvement measures have been proven to be highly effective in the poorest health systems, but they often are not applied appropriately. Because these problems cannot be addressed by training alone, USAID's research has emphasized the development of quality-improvement collaboratives that enable peer-to-peer sharing of best practices in service delivery.
- Although the health workforce represents about 70 percent of the cost of health care, effective human resource development and management continue to be weak. Though well established, the general principles for maximizing workforce productivity need to be adapted to individual health systems. Producing more health workers is a key priority in many countries, but it must be part of a larger strategy that addresses recruitment and retention, increased efficiency, quality training, and effective human resource management systems. USAID is developing global guidance on the management of human resources for health, in collaboration with WHO and other United Nations partners, as well as pecuniary and non-pecuniary incentives to enhance worker productivity.
- Few developing countries have sufficiently effective health information systems, a key component to monitoring and evaluating health interventions as well as maximizing efficiency. Information systems are a critical tool for measuring progress toward health goals, identifying greatest gaps and needs, and enabling the efficient use of resources. An effective information system can support the evidence base for policy and strategy development and optimize allocation of scarce resources. USAID is improving data systems and quality and evaluating the effectiveness of information system investments and their impact on the health system.
- An estimated 30 percent of the world's population lacks regular access to medicines and other essential health supplies; this proportion rises to more than 50 percent in the poorest areas of Africa and Asia. Health systems with inadequate regulatory capacity are ill-equipped to control the entry of counterfeit and substandard medicines and products into the marketplace. Along with the inappropriate use of medicines, access to poor-quality medicines can contribute to the emergence of drug resistance and an increased need for second-line medicines, which can add to the cost and potential duration of treatment. USAID is raising awareness on the impact of substandard medicines on the quality of health care in developing countries and is developing tools to evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance systems.
- Global estimates indicate that more than 180 million people in developing countries suffer from financial catastrophe due to high out-of-pocket health care expenditures and limited subsidies. Additionally, institutional and human capacity gaps in health finance systems result in inefficient resource allocation and weak financial oversight, leading to poorly managed and underfunded health systems. USAID supports increased access to costing information, efficient resource management allocation, sustainable financing strategies, sound financial policies, and effective oversight.

- Best practices in health governance involve financial stewardship, evidence-based policymaking, civil society participation, and effective leadership. The lack of participatory, transparent, and accountable governance hinders policy regulation and limits the effectiveness of health system performance; limited resources can exacerbate the problems of poor governance and corruption. According to Transparency International, 40 percent of the poorest countries in the world are also the most corrupt. USAID is developing methods for improved governance and leadership in resource-poor settings, including increased community-level oversight of health systems and strengthening of facility-level governance mechanisms.

Areas of Research and Introduction

USAID conducts health systems research and evaluations to identify and test improved practices and to facilitate host country introduction and scale-up of effective health interventions, which will reduce the burden of disease that most contributes to mortality and severe morbidity. USAID's health systems research meets four criteria: (1) It is relevant to the successful implementation of health interventions in HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis (TB), reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP), nutrition, and maternal, newborn, and child health

(MNCH); (2) it has the potential to improve access, quality, and/or affordability; (3) it can achieve demonstrable and measurable results within three to five years; and (4) it is suitable for sustained use in low-resource settings.

Understanding and Protecting the Effectiveness of Medical Products

The sale of counterfeit, altered, and poor-quality malaria drugs is particularly acute in developing countries due to the limited regulatory capacity of country health systems and their inability to control the entry of antimalarials into the marketplace. USAID supported a collaborative WHO-U.S. Pharmacopeia Drug Quality and Information Program study that documented quality control failure rates of antimalarials sampled from public, private program, and informal providers in Senegal (44 percent), Madagascar (30 percent), and Uganda (26 percent). More than 500 academic and professional media outlets worldwide have reported on the study results, which are being used in policy advocacy to strengthen quality assurance systems and regulatory frameworks.

USAID also is supporting the development of a tool to enable national regulatory authorities to evaluate their quality assurance systems and to prioritize corrective actions to purchase medicines of good quality.